

## Tumulary Necropolis of Olbia

by Valentina Papanova

Olbia was founded in the second quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC and existed up to the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. The lifespan of the necropolis is limited by these dates. The necropolis included tumuli and barrows. None of the ancient necropolises of the North Shore region of the Black Sea had as many barrows<sup>1</sup> as those of Olbia. This is why they received the name "The Big Gorge of a Hundred Graves". This name is on the maps of the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD made by F. de Wallan, by N. Mordvinov, and O. de Ribas<sup>2</sup>.

We have the information about 36 barrows of the Olbia Necropolis. According to the data presented by the F. de Wallan and A. Yvarov there were more than 300 barrows, only at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>3</sup>. But already in 1858 Captain Biern marks only 213 barrows on his map<sup>4</sup> and there are 190 barrows marked on the map, compiled by Kozhevnikov, Mikhailov and Fyodorov in 1871<sup>5</sup>.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most of the barrows of the Olbia Necropolis were excavated by robbers or by orders of those who owned the land on which the Olbia Necropolis was situated. The excavations, however, were not carried out by specialists. Under the Soviet power there were two barrows examined and two excavated<sup>6</sup>. In 1990, the research of the Evresibiy and Areta barrow embankments on the

Black Sea coast came to an end<sup>7</sup>. Thus we have information about 36 barrows of the Olbia Necropolis. This information is incomplete and sometimes very fragmented because the researchers, as a rule, reported about funeral constructions and funeral tools.

In addition, the famous Olbia researcher B. Farmakovsky, who had excavated several barrows at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, published full reports only about excavations of the Evresibiy and Areta crypts and the Zeus barrow. (The information about the rest of the barrows excavated by his expedition, published in the accounts of the Imperial Archaeological commission, was incomplete).

Tumuli of the Olbia Necropolis were covered with 1 up to 20 meters of light yellow clay. According to F. de Wallan, most of the tumuli of Olbia Necropolis were from 2.1 to 8.5 meters high<sup>8</sup>. The height of Zeus barrow, measured by Academician P. Koeppen at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was 18 meters. Its diameter was 119.5 meters<sup>9</sup>. The barrows' height did not depend on the type of funeral constructions: either stone and ground graves or hole and crypt graves. For example, there are 9 barrows without stone crypts marked on V. Derenkin's plan<sup>10</sup>. They were situated in Shirokaya Balka (the Wide Gorge region) and had considerable embankments. The difference in the height of the barrow embankments is also observed in the Necropolis of Kerameikos (Athens)<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Rostovtsev 1925; Kastanajan 1950, 124 - 138; Kaufman 1947, 1 - 32; Silanteva 1959, 3 - 107; Tsvetaeva 1957, 227 - 251.

<sup>2</sup> Papanova 1994a, 3 - 4; Papanova 1994b, 99 - 100.

<sup>3</sup> Ivarov 1853, tabl. VIII B; Papanova 1994b, 99.

<sup>4</sup> Papanova 1994b, 100.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>6</sup> Kozub 1968, 13 - 14; Burakov 1979, 80; Papanova, 1985, 78; Beljaev 1991/17.

<sup>7</sup> Kryjitskij 1993, 77.

<sup>8</sup> Tunkina 1994, 8 - 9.

<sup>9</sup> Koeppen 1819, N6348.

<sup>10</sup> Derenkin, Pismo 1916, D. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Kurtz, Boardman 1971, 56, 80.

Tumuli embankments often had *crepida* (fig. 1.a). All in all, there are 8 barrows of this kind stated. Some of them covered partly-destroyed cromlechs, such as the barrow excavated by Y. Kozub in 1968 (fig. 2). The cromlechs consisted of two rows of crude lime stones of 11.2 meters in diameter and 0.87 meters in height<sup>12</sup>. Barrows with *crepidus* had been constructed since 600 BC. Such barrows could be found in other regions of Greece<sup>13</sup>. Barrows were spread over stone and ground crypts, pit graves, and cenotaphs<sup>14</sup>.

Most of the barrows of the Olbia Necropolis were spread over different types of stone crypts (fig. 3, 4). Stone crypts appeared in the last half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. They were constructed in two ways: those with one and two chambers. According to the floors, we distinguish barrows with two-slope, semicircular, horizontal (flat) or corbelling floors. In addition, there are crypts with one or two chambers and ground *dromos* or reveted with stone *dromos*.

One-chamber stone crypts with two-slope, semicircular and corbelling floors are characteristic of the Hellenistic period. Throughout the early centuries AD, two-chamber crypts appear. The crypts of the Roman period are represented by types of floors: horizontal and two-slope.

The crypts of the 1<sup>st</sup> type are those with one chamber and twin-slope floors (fig. 5.a). Such crypts known in the Olbia Necropolis in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC were used also in the early centuries AD for new burials. Fifteen stone crypts had the above mentioned type of floor. They date back to the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC<sup>15</sup>. Six crypts of this type, which had special cornices with a slot for slab supports of the floor, refer to the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. The rest of the crypts date back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC<sup>16</sup>.

Crypt chamber of the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC were constructed basically of well-processed lime slabs. There are crypts of 1904/5, 1904/28, 1911/1, 1912/1, 1969/1, 1982/1.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC a less perfect construction of crypt chamber walls is observed, as, for example, in the crypt of 1912/3. A number of crypts of this kind did not have *dromos* (1886/1, 1886/4 a, b, 1904/28, 1911/1, 1913/1, 1969/1, 1982/1). In such crypts, the burial was performed through their upper parts, and only after that, either the slabs of the floor were placed above, or the crypts were closed with special stone panels. Some crypts of this kind had ground *dromos* either with steps or with a ramp.

The question of the origin of the above mentioned crypts remains rather problematic. M. Parovič-Pesikan considers that these crypts are characteristic of the Eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea<sup>17</sup>. The same view-point shared by A. Burakov and V. Zubar<sup>18</sup>. The author, in her article "*The new stone crypt of Olbia Necropolis*", considers that these crypts have a different regional origin - the western part of the Mediterranean Sea<sup>19</sup>. At the present stage of our research we consider the western part of the Mediterranean Sea to be one of the regions of the two-slope crypts location. The same crypts are known to exist in the archaic epoch in Cyprus necropolises<sup>20</sup>. In the Hellenistic period crypts with a two-slope floor appeared in the necropolises of Cirenaica and Ksanfa in Lycia<sup>21</sup>. Those crypts as well as the Cyprus ones, were constructed on the surface, not in the ground<sup>22</sup>. Crypts fully identical to the Olbia ones were excavated in Greek colonies, South-Western Italy and Sicily<sup>23</sup>. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC the crypts with a two-slope floor could be found on the western coast of the Black Sea, in Thracia<sup>24</sup>. So, the crypts with two-slope floors, identical to Olbia ones, appear in the archaic period in Cyprus. Since the 6<sup>th</sup> century they had been known in the necropolises of Balonia, Paestum and Naxos,

<sup>12</sup> Kozub 1968, 13 - 14.

<sup>13</sup> Kurtz, Boardman 1971, 81, 176 - 177.

<sup>14</sup> Papanova 1994a, 14.

<sup>15</sup> Parovič-Pesikan 1974, 49 - 50; Burakov 1979, 81; Papanova 1985, 81.

<sup>16</sup> Papanova 1985, 83 - 84.

<sup>17</sup> Parovič-Pesikan 1974, 47.

<sup>18</sup> Burakov 1979, 82; Zubar 1982, 25.

<sup>19</sup> Papanova 1985, 82 - 83.

<sup>20</sup> Perrot, Chipier 1885, 209 - 210, figs. 154 - 155.

<sup>21</sup> Velickij 1878, 154.

<sup>22</sup> Machatschek 1967, Taf. 34 - 36, 38, 41, 44, 49, 51, 53.

<sup>23</sup> Modestov 1904, 67, fig. 25; Zalesskij 1959, 48, fig. 2; Papanova 1985, 84; Sestieri 1959, 33 - 37; Rastrelli 1988, 359, fig. 73; 375, fig. 84 a, b.

<sup>24</sup> Filov 1932, 61, fig. 10.

since the 5<sup>th</sup> century on Thracia Necropolis and from the second half on the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC - on Olbia necropolis. It should be noted that only the West-Mediterranean crypts are fully identical to Olbia ones. The Cypriote and Thracian crypts differ from the latter by their ground construction.

The second type of stone crypts, known in the Olbia necropolis of the Hellenistic period is a one-chamber crypt with a semicircular floor and a sort of semicircular arch (fig.5.c). There are crypts of 1907/37 and 1907/10 dating back to the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. A number of scholars call this type of stone crypts Macedonian<sup>25</sup>. We agree with M.B. Parovič-Pesikan's point of view which proves that this type of crypt is typical of the Hellenistic tradition, and that the Greek colonists in Thracia modified it<sup>26</sup>. Similar crypts are known in Olynthus and Kilikia<sup>27</sup>, Callatis<sup>28</sup> and Odessus<sup>29</sup>.

One-chamber crypts with corbelling floors belong to the third type of stone crypts in Olbia in the Hellenistic period (fig. 5.b). A. Yvarov wrote that all the crypts examined by him had corbelling and horizontal floor<sup>30</sup>. A. Yvarov also mentioned the sizes of one of the examined crypts: 3.7 meters in the length, 10.76 meters in height, 3.06 meters in width<sup>31</sup>. He noted that the crypts with stepped floors were similar to those of Golden and King barrow in Bosphor<sup>32</sup>.

One-chamber stone crypt of a smaller size and with horizontal floors were known in the first centuries AD. The similar type of a funeral construction was found on the late Hellenistic necropolis of Hagios Kosmas in Attica<sup>33</sup>. This type of stone crypt is spread in Crete, in Zygyouries and Corinth<sup>34</sup>.

The fourth type of stone crypts of the Olbia necropolis is represented by two-chamber monumental crypts with horizontal floors. Two of such crypts have remained by our time: the crypt under Zeus barrow (fig. 6) and Evresibiy and Areta's crypt (fig. 7). These crypts are remarkable monuments of the ancient architecture of the northern coast of the Black Sea.

Thus the mentioned stone crypts of the Olbia Necropolis are evidence of the variety of the funeral architecture in Hellenistic and Roman time. Its rise was primarily connected with the spread of the apotheosis of the dead<sup>35</sup>. A hero had to leave a barrow or a monumental crypt as evidence of his glory of the beyond and the place of cult. Those crypts (héroa) had been taken care of by descendants for centuries.

Thirty of the Olbia crypts date back to the Hellenistic period and six to Roman times. There were many more stone crypts in the Olbia necropolis but they were excavated by non-experts. Therefore, we have no information about them. In his report, B.Y. Cizengauzen mentioned that the majority of the biggest tumuli with stone crypts had been excavated by Count A. Yvarov according to the order by Count Kushelev (the landowner of the areas where Olbia was located), and also by robbers<sup>36</sup>.

It should be noted that stone crypts in the Olbia necropolis were not situated right in the center of a barrow (fig. 1.b, 3).

According to the available information, 20 out of 36 tumuli covered stone crypts, 3 barrows - ground crypts (1886/10, 1886, 1913), 4 barrows covered pit graves (1886/3, 1894/1, 1893/2, 1907/1).

Olbia tumuli's embankments covered from 1 up to 36 funeral constructions of different types and epochs (fig. 4.a, b). For example, a small barrow in "The Big Gorge of Hundred Graves", which was excavated in 1904, covered 36 funeral constructions of different types. It was sprinkled over two stone crypts with two-slope covering in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. It covered pit graves and ground crypts of earlier periods<sup>37</sup>. Sometimes

<sup>25</sup> Preda 1963, 38; Parovič-Pesikan 1974, 49.

<sup>26</sup> Parovič-Pesikan 1974, 47 - 49.

<sup>27</sup> Machatschek 1967, 117 - 118, Abb. XI - XVII; Robinson 1967, 37 - 39.

<sup>28</sup> Preda 1961, 157 - 169; Preda 1963, 38, fig. 28, 30 - 31; Fedorov, Polevoj 1973, 169.

<sup>29</sup> Mirčev 1958, 570, 574.

<sup>30</sup> Ivarov 1851, 42.

<sup>31</sup> Ivarov 1851, 43.

<sup>32</sup> Ivarov 1851, 42, prim. 1; Ivarov 1853, tabl. XI.

<sup>33</sup> Mylonas 1934, 268, fig. 12; 269, fig. 13 - 14.

<sup>34</sup> Shear 1929, 534, fig. 16; Mylonas 1934, 277.

<sup>35</sup> Rusjaeva 1992, 184 - 185.

<sup>36</sup> Cizengauzen, Zabelin 1875, XXVII.

<sup>37</sup> Farmakovskij 1907, 34 - 35, fig. 48.

tumuli were erected above simultaneous burials. Thus the barrow of 1886/3 covered two stone ground crypts and a pit grave of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. Most likely, in this case, barrows were spread over those funeral constructions that were closer to the center of the embankment; the rest were additional burials, being huge family tombs. Under the tumulus of 1886/9 there was a fragmented funeral urn, and under the tumulus of 1886/9, there was a lime-stone slab on which stood an ordinary clay vessel with a stone inside<sup>38</sup>. Only a bronze arrow-head was found under the barrow of 1886/6<sup>39</sup>. In addition, no funeral construction was found under the barrow of 1991/1<sup>40</sup>. Most probably, the given barrow were cenotaphs. Such barrows-cenotaphs were excavated in the Kerameikos necropolis<sup>41</sup>. Under the floors of barrow 1907/1 the remains of the funeral feasts were discovered.

Simultaneously with the barrow in the Olbia necropolis long hilly embankments were spread out, covering different types of funeral constructions. These embankments were in one place to the north-west from the town of Olbia<sup>42</sup>. In 700 - 650 BC in the Athens necropolis similar hills appeared<sup>43</sup>. They covered less rich burials, but were an expensive addition to the funeral expenses.

For a long time, in the literature on the Olbia necropolis archeologists had stated different dates of the appearance of its first barrows. For example, Yu.I. Kozub considers that such constructions first appeared in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>44</sup>. V. M. Skudnova states that they occurred in the Classical, Hellenistic and Roman times of the Olbia necropolis<sup>45</sup>. M. B. Parovič-Pesikan in his monograph does not mention the barrows of the Hellenistic period of the Olbia necropolis. He just uses the data on stone crypts under barrows<sup>46</sup>. S. A. Lipavskij is the first to put

forward the idea that the barrows in the Olbia necropolis date back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>47</sup>.

The author came to the conclusion that barrow embankments in the Olbia necropolis appeared from the moment of its existence, i.e. at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, and fully agrees to this point of view. It is known that barrows as parts of funerals appeared in a number of ancient societies in the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC<sup>48</sup>. The custom of erecting barrows was brought to Ancient Greece by the proto-Greeks at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC<sup>49</sup>. The Dorians who came to Ancient Greece continued this tradition<sup>50</sup>. In ancient times, barrows were erected not only in continental Greece but also on the Greek Islands as on Ionia<sup>51</sup>. During the Classic period, they were known in necropolises of Attica, Larissa, Pitten, Olynthus, Eretria, Macedonia, Amphipolis, Pella and Beotia<sup>52</sup>.

Barrows had been erected in the ancient necropolises of the Western and Northern coasts of the Black Sea since the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. In the Istria necropolis, the tradition to erect barrows refers back to the 6<sup>th</sup> up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC<sup>53</sup>.

From the Archaic period to the Hellenistic period, the barrows were used in the Callatis necropolis<sup>54</sup>. A great deal of them were erected in the Macedonian, Dacian and Thracian necropolises<sup>55</sup>. On the Northern coast of the Black Sea, the earliest Greek barrows were excavated on the Island of Berezan. Von Stern dated them back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>56</sup>. In the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, the barrows of the Maritsinsky necropolis

<sup>38</sup> Suručan 1891, XIII - XVI.

<sup>39</sup> Suručan 1891, XII.

<sup>40</sup> Beljaev 1991.

<sup>41</sup> Kurtz, Boardman 1971, 81, 99.

<sup>42</sup> Ivarov 1853, Tabl. VIII B; Cizengauzen, Zabelin 1873, XXVII - XXVIII; Jastrebov 1896, 98.

<sup>43</sup> Kurtz, Boardman 1971, 81.

<sup>44</sup> Kozub 1968, 17, 131; Kozub 1987, 29 - 30.

<sup>45</sup> Skudnova 1992, 5, 7.

<sup>46</sup> Parovič-Pesikan 1974, 38 - 52.

<sup>47</sup> Lipavskij 1990, 18 - 28.

<sup>48</sup> Masson 1976, 149, 164 - 165; Androsov 1989, 11; Wiesner 1932, 11, 13, 18, 35, 40.

<sup>49</sup> Skilaria 1972, 32.

<sup>50</sup> Pausanias II, 7, 2; VI, 213, VII, 16, 2; Homer, *Illiada*, XII, 125 - 126, 250 - 257, XXIV, 799; Homer, *Odissea*, XII, 13 - 14; Blavatskaja 1966, 46; Kurtz, Boardman 1971, 38, 56, 75.

<sup>51</sup> Kurtz, Boardman 1971, 176 - 178.

<sup>52</sup> Robinson 1942, 117 - 118; Kurtz, Boardman 1971, 177 - 185; Tsvetaeva 1957, 228; Lapin 1966, 173.

<sup>53</sup> Alexandrescu 1966, 140; Fedorov, Polevoj 1973, 169.

<sup>54</sup> Preda 1961, 157 - 169; Preda 1963, 38, fig. 28, 30 - 31; Fedorov, Polevoj 1973, 169.

<sup>55</sup> Pozvan 1915, 150; Mansel 1941, 257; Andronikos 1990, 112 - 113.

<sup>56</sup> Stern 1907, 45.

were erected<sup>57</sup>. The barrows of the Southern and Northern necropolises in the Big Gorge Chertovatoye are dated back to the first quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>58</sup>. Berezan, Maritsinsky, Southern and Northern necropolises are those of the ancient settlements of the Olbian chora. In contrast to the Olbia necropolis on Bosphor, the barrows of the Greek aristocracy are situated next to those of the sindo-meotian aristocracy, and they appeared in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC<sup>59</sup>.

The review of the barrow necropolises of Greece, Asia Minor, the Western and Northern coasts of the Black Sea provides evidence that the custom to erect tumuli is deeply rooted; it goes back to the Bronze Age and does not contradict the Greek funeral tradition. In addition, in this funeral tradition, embankment, a kind of a small barrow above the graves (0.5 to 0.75 meters in height), is obligatory<sup>60</sup>. In the course of time, these embankments were either covered with later embankments or were ruined as those of the Kerameikos necropolis<sup>61</sup>.

It's necessary to mention that in 1912 - 1913 Prof. P. Bakarov, who studied ash embankments and soils in the Olbia necropolis, wrote that being not high, the upper over burial parts of the monuments were soon covered with embankments, the height of which throughout 2,000 years reached 2.2 - 2.5 m<sup>62</sup>. At the same time the highest barrows got to be twice the size they used to be. The information about the Zeus barrow embankment proves these conclusion. In 1819 P. Koeppen defined that its height was 18 m, and in 1902 B. Farmakovskij notes that its height is 7.367 m<sup>63</sup>.

It's quite possible that the first barrows in the Olbia necropolis appeared at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. The Greek barrows of that time had low embankments and that's why they haven't been preserved by our time. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC the huge barrows with stone crypts

began to be erected. The barrows of the Kep necropolis on the Bochor can be taken as an example<sup>64</sup>. Primarily it is connected with the spread of the apotheosis of the dead all over the ancient Greek world in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> - 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC the barrows architecture in the Olbia necropolis fell into decay<sup>65</sup>. This phenomenon was caused by the crisis of the town of Olbia in the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> - 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC<sup>66</sup>.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD traditions of barrow erection in Olbia revived, but in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD their spreading was over because of the continuous crisis of the Olbia polis<sup>67</sup>.

#### \* Abbreviations

1904/5      The first number refers to year of excavations; the following number corresponds to the crypt N°.

**Valentina PAPANOVA**  
3, Uritskoho Str.  
71105 - Berdyansk  
Zaporozhion Region  
UKRAINE

<sup>57</sup> Ebert 1913, 5, 11.

<sup>58</sup> Snytco, Lipavskij 1989, 131 - 132.

<sup>59</sup> Tsvetaeva 1957, 229 - 232.

<sup>60</sup> Savostina 1984, 6.

<sup>61</sup> Kurtz, Boardman 1971, 80 - 81.

<sup>62</sup> Barakov 1913, 117 - 119.

<sup>63</sup> Koeppen 1820, V. 715, 65; Farmakovskij 1904, 7.

<sup>64</sup> Sorokina 1962, 98.

<sup>65</sup> Krapivina 1993b, 76.

<sup>66</sup> Kryjitskij 1985, 132.

<sup>67</sup> Krapivina 1993a, 155 - 157.

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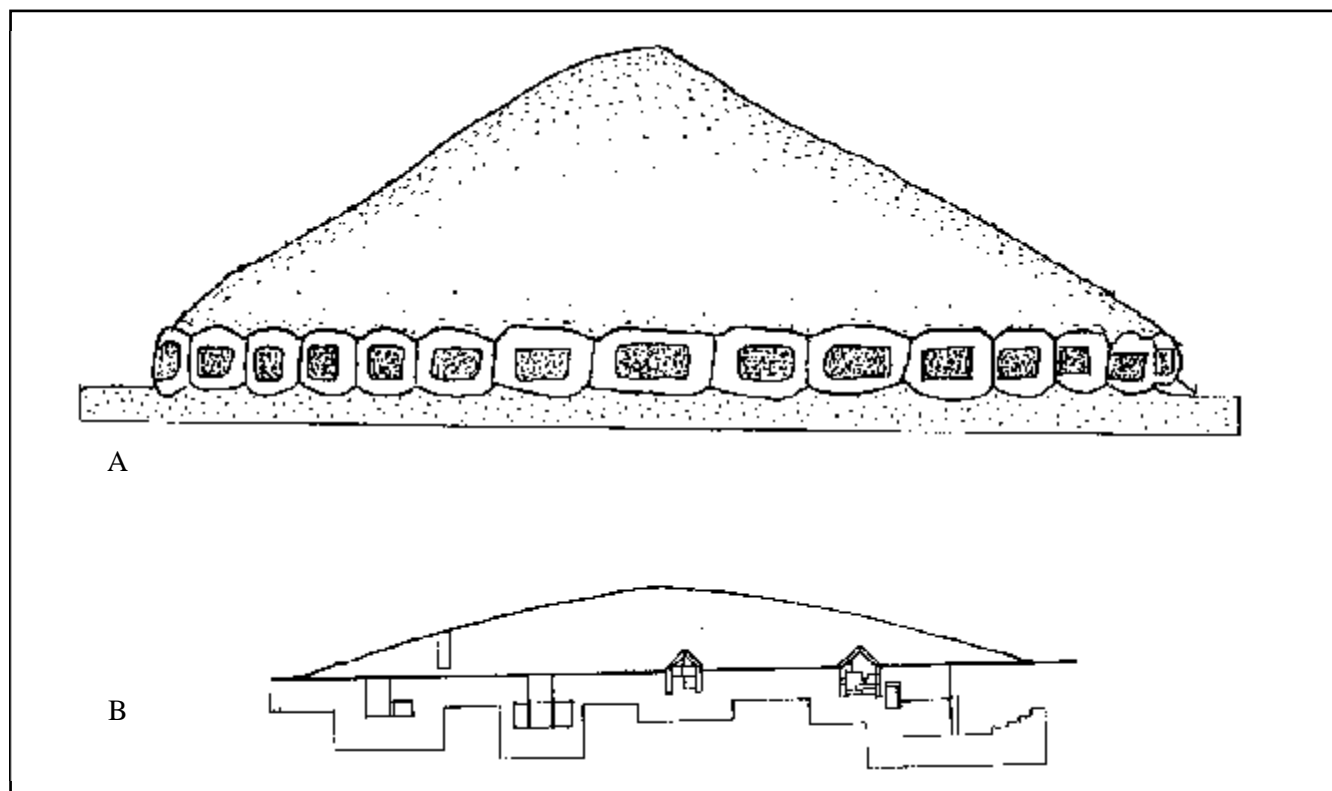


Fig. 1. Barrows with crepidus (A) and crypts with two-sloped floors (B) (excavation 1912)

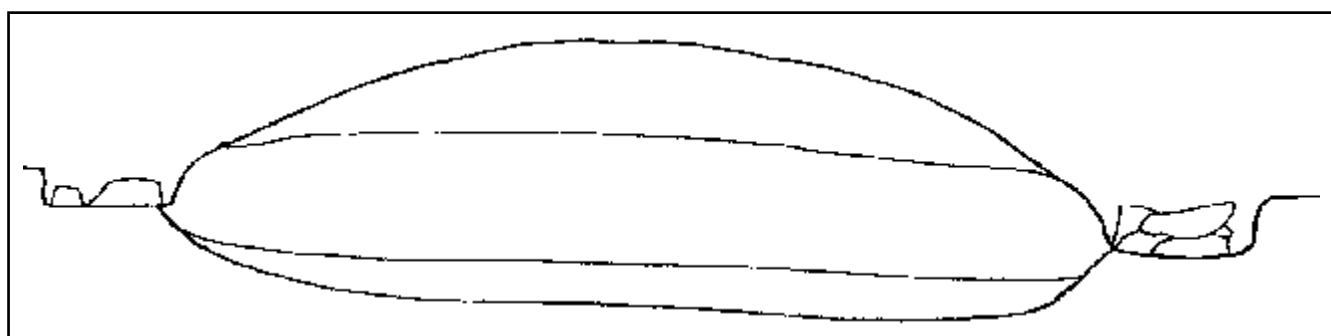


Fig. 2. Barrow with cromlechs (excavation 1968)

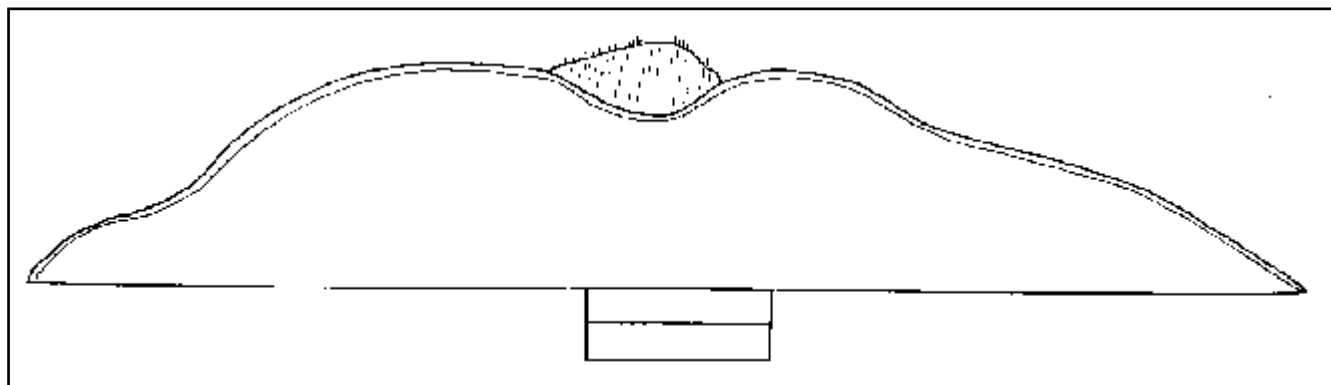


Fig. 3. Barrow with two-sloped floors crypts (excavation 1982)



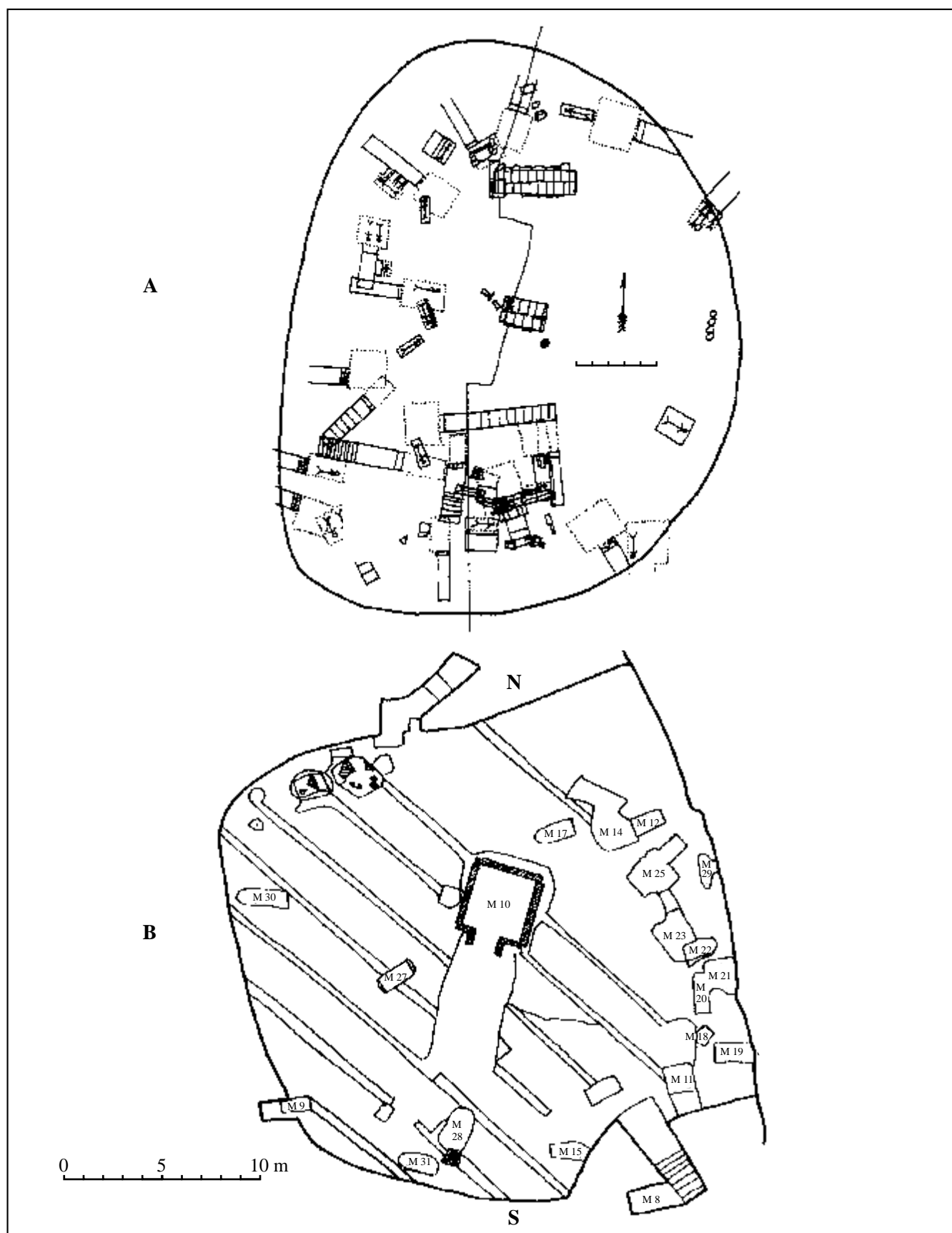


Fig. 4. Tombs under barrows (A - excavation 1906; B - excavation 1907)

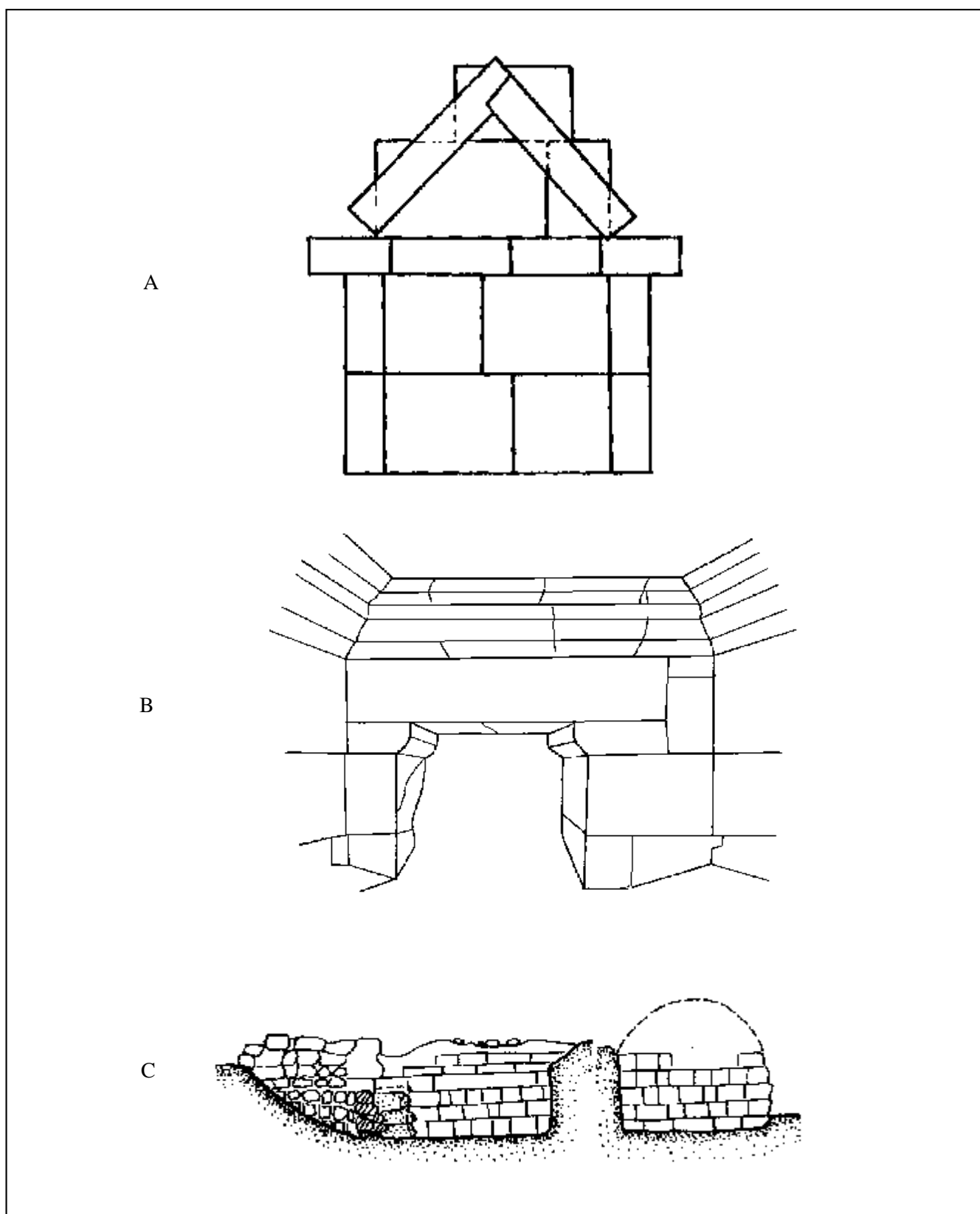


Fig. 5. A - crypt with two-slope floors (excavation 1920); B - crypt with corbelling floors (excavation 1844); C - crypt with semicircular floors (excavation 1907).

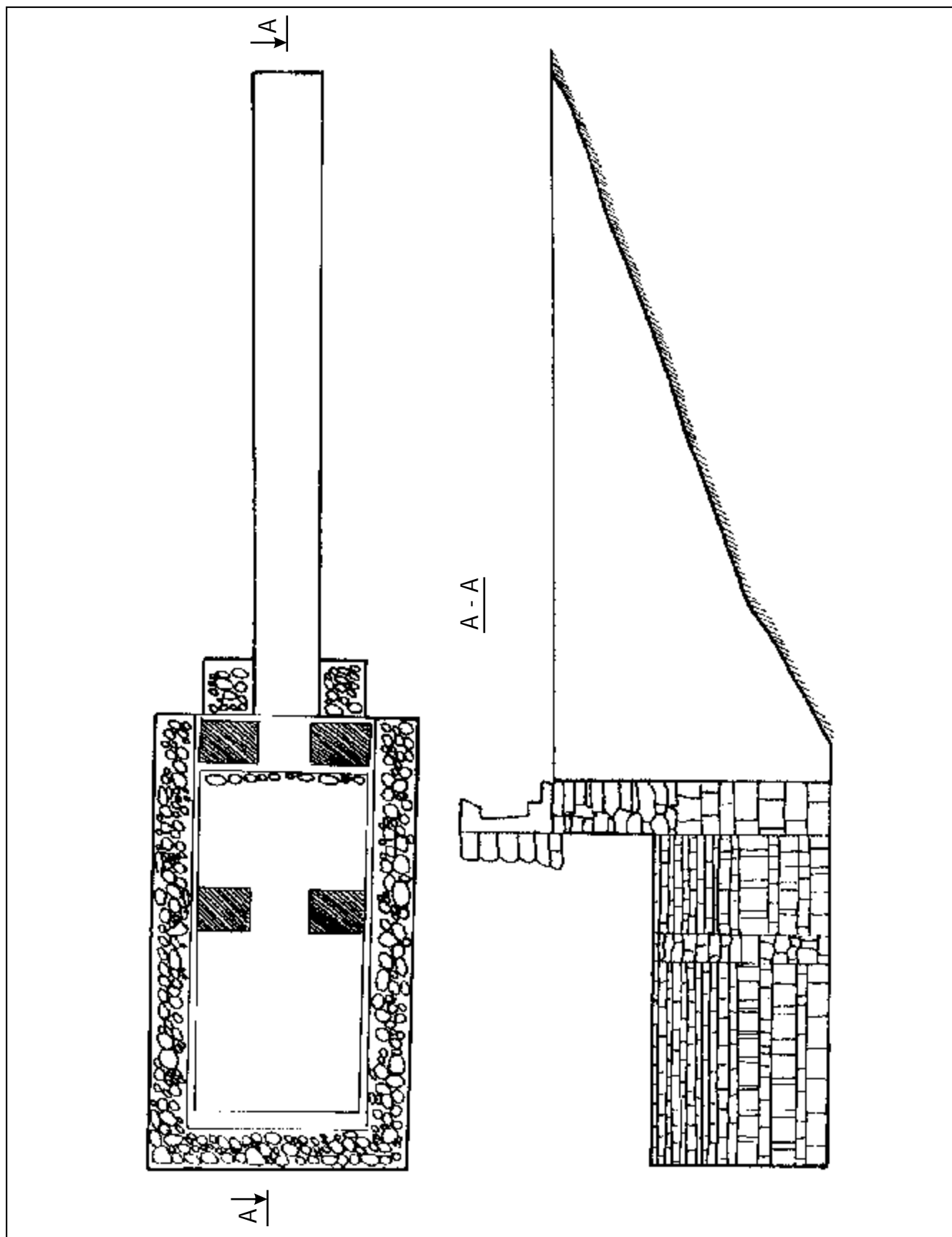


Fig. 6. Crypt under Zeus barrow

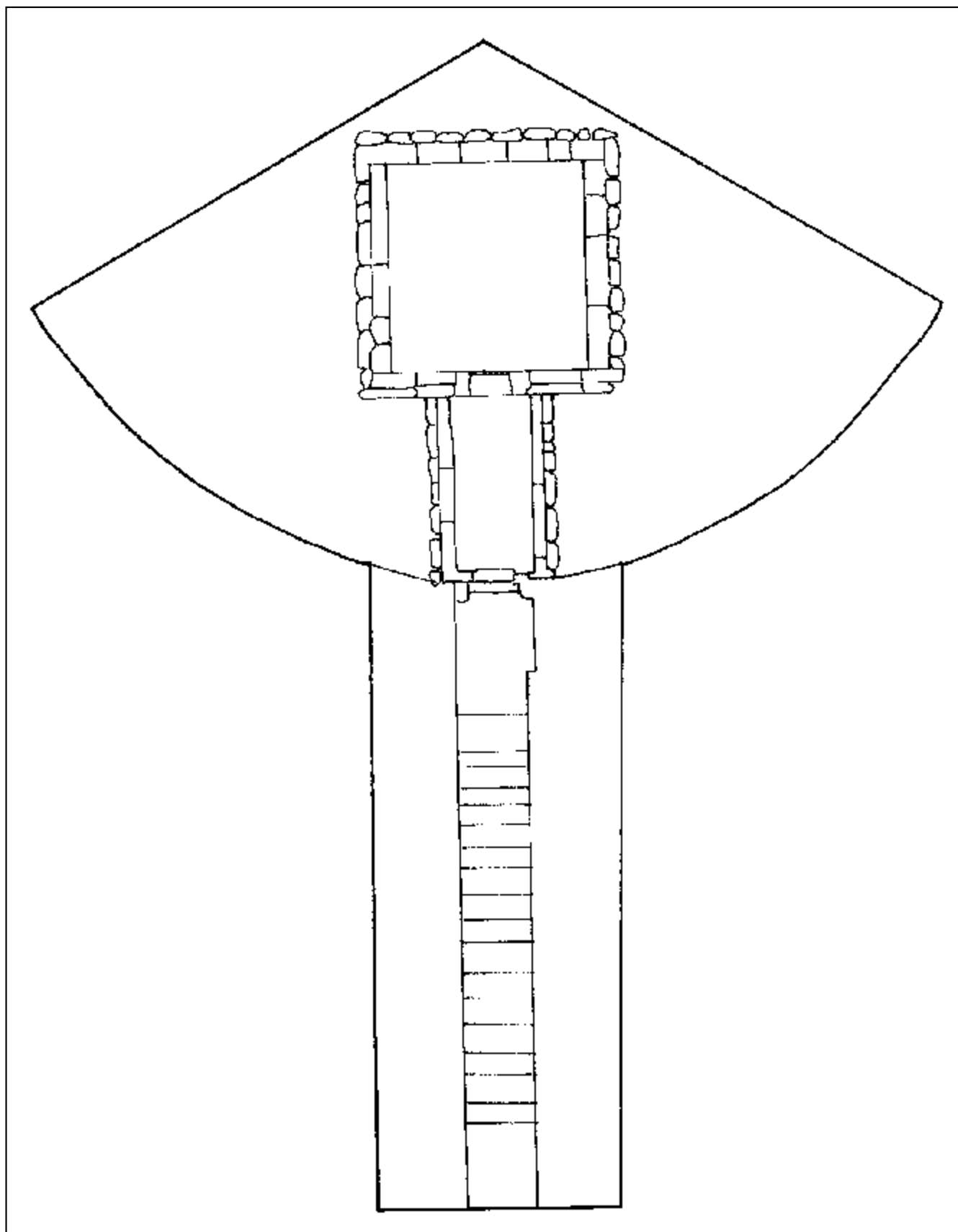


Fig. 7. Evresibiy and Areta's crypt